



**Denali Commission
Quarterly Progress Report
July 1 – September 30, 2020**

SWAMC Staff: Shirley Marquardt, Executive Director; Laura Vaught, Economic Development Specialist

Project Status: The project is on schedule, on budget, and has not experienced any problems to date, other than impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Rural Broadband

SWAMC staff assisted with outreach to tribes in our region to notify them of the importance of the 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Window which was originally scheduled to close on August 3 but was extended to September 2. We shared in our newsletter, sent mass emails, and coordinated with Harold Johnston of Alaska Tribal Broadband as well as the Denali Commission to get the word out regarding the assistance that both were offering to get tribes signed up. As a result of these efforts, virtually the entire SWAMC region is covered now by tribal spectrum.

SWAMC received notification in early August that we were awarded supplemental EDA CARES Act funding to help our region with COVID-19 mitigation, response, and resiliency. Part of our proposed project will focus on broadband development: SWAMC is planning to work with Harold Johnston at Alaska Tribal Broadband where his firm will provide planning and technical support to both tribes and non-tribal entities in the SWAMC region to prepare for and seize upcoming broadband opportunities. We will focus on the wide deployment of a fixed last-mile solution utilizing the 2.5GHz spectrum for tribes who want to provide service, and negotiating strategies and block/channel use with service providers and businesses, municipalities, seafood companies and others who want to have a private LTE system. We will also provide information on the planning, design, vendors, and equipment to connect to new middle-mile satellite technology to communities in the region who are not on the map of undersea cable middle-mile designs.

TRANSPORTATION

Alaska Marine Highway System

Marquardt continued to advocate for the AMHS being funded to provide basic service while the Governor's Reshaping Team analyzed the system's failings while evaluating options for service. As a past member of the Marine Transportation Advisory Board, Marquardt has direct contact and information sharing with the operating structure of the system and the SW Coastal communities that depend on them. Marquardt is working closely with the Southeast Conference Executive Director Robert Venables who is also on Governor Dunleavy's AMHS Re-Shaping Team. The AMHS is a vital economic connector in the SWAMC region for municipalities, fisheries participants, construction companies, and businesses, and its sustainability is of great importance in our region. Marquardt is also communicating with State Legislators

regarding the funding and construction of the Tustumena using federal funds with minimal matching state funds. The funds are there, but the construction is still on hold until the Governor makes a decision on whether to continue. Marquardt participated in the bi-weekly reshaping work group discussions via Zoom sessions and teleconferences and the Reshaping team has finalized their recommendations and submitted them to the Governor. One of the recommendations was to remove Southwest Alaska from ferry service, but it was changed to reduced (heavily reduced) seasonal service from Kodiak to Unalaska.

Air Transportation

Marquardt was named to the advisory body of the new ADOT Unalaska Airport Plan Team. The first meeting was held October 8th via Zoom and we have ten days to comment on the draft plan outline. No new airport/runway will be analyzed in the plan, just improvements to safety and ideal aircraft identification for the future. The company replacing Ravn is conducting training flights into Unalaska as of Oct 7th and it is not yet clear what their full route will be in Southwest Alaska.

ENERGY

Work is underway on the third round of the USDA REDA grant to provide subsidized energy audits to businesses statewide. The goal of this program is to help business owners obtain an energy audit and access funding to install energy efficiency upgrades identified in the audit. Many fishing vessel owners have participated in the program in order to upgrade to refrigerated seawater (RSW) systems to chill their catch. This simple yet critical step allows the fisherman to get top dollar for his/her salmon at delivery. The Kodiak ComFish trade show was postponed in March due to COVID and was held in September in a virtual format. SWAMC had originally planned to have a booth at the tradeshow and instead had an online ad displayed at the virtual forum to advertise our audit program. Vaught also presented at the Alaska Energy Efficiency Partnership meeting in September to provide an update on the program; participants were impressed to hear that the program has a high conversion rate of about 40%, with 66 audits having been conducted and 27 USDA REAP awards secured by business owners to complete the energy efficiency upgrades identified in their audit. Over \$300,000 has been awarded to business owners to date as a result of SWAMC's program feeding business owners into USDA's REAP grant program. Denali Commission funding is being used to help support this energy audit program by providing non-Federal match.

RESOURCES

Mariculture

SWAMC has worked with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) on a Department of Energy, Advanced Manufacturing Office (AMO)-funded grant application to investigate uses of kelp and seaweed to make various products, including fuel. The project aims to develop viable solutions to processing bottlenecks holding back expansion of kelp production, identifying processes to be conducted in Alaska to produce various products and identify the market potential of those products. PNNL is managing the grant and SWAMC is providing match and managing a Steering Committee made up of stakeholders from the SWAMC region. SWAMC continues to host bi-monthly videoconferences with PNNL and advise them on the marine environment and the business structure of seafood processing plants in the region. The

Steering Committee provides local input and some SC members provide kelp samples for PNNL and partners to process and analyze in their lab. Six videoconferences were held during the July-September quarter. The month of September included planning for a webinar that PNNL will be hosting on October 20 with representatives from DOE on *Energy and Coproducts Originating from Alaskan Sustainable Kelp*. This webinar will include participation from SWAMC, Denali Commission, AFDF, UAF, and multiple Alaska kelp companies. This project seems to be moving at a glacial pace and there is hope that will change as traveling protocols return to normal and site visits and in person meetings with seafood processors are options again.

Mariculture was included as part of the scope for the supplemental funding that SWAMC was recently awarded from EDA. SWAMC staff has met with partners Riley Smith at AFDF and Chris Sannito at Alaska Sea Grant in recent weeks to develop a scope for this work, ensuring that SWAMC addresses both EDA's funding direction to focus on resiliency for the region and helps fill a need in the industry. The scope of this new project includes 3 objectives: 1. Seaweed Product Development – SWAMC will supplement existing work by Alaska Sea Grant to expand on seaweed product development at the Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center; 2. Seaweed Processing Pilot Project – SWAMC will help Chris Sannito expand on an initial project hosted in Kodiak in summer 2020 to host more processing trainings and include applicants from across the SWAMC region; 3. Outreach & Information Sharing – SWAMC and partners will complete a comprehensive analysis of past, current, and pending mariculture projects within Alaska and share with stakeholders, including at SWAMC's annual Conference. This scope has been submitted to EDA recently, but it has not been accepted yet, so it is subject to change.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

AmeriCorps VISTA and the Alaska Maritime Workforce Development Plan

AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer Brooks Duncan has continued updating the Alaska Career Information Service database. He has added more maritime-specific occupational information into the database. Brooks has also continued to create and deploy new career awareness and exploration content. He has further narrowed the scope of the top 5 occupation clusters that the project will focus on. This will push the jobs with the most priority to the front and allow for the jobs that are most in demand to easily filled.

Due to COVID-19, communication has been a challenge and we are still experimenting with new ways to communicate. Some of the most effective ways include Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Email. Brooks is still in connection with 'TotalView' and is working in order to incorporate VR and 3D technology in the course work.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, staff has been busy working with stakeholders in our region including businesses and municipalities to access CARES Act funds. SWAMC provided regional support for municipalities including helping some plan their local government use of CARES Act funding. With additional funding provided by the State of Alaska DCCED, SWAMC contracted with a firm called LiveStories to provide a financial assistance tool called FORWARD to businesses in our region. FORWARD

is a digital navigation site that connects business owners to federal, state, and local funding programs, both CARES Act programs and broader, to help businesses weather the economic impacts of COVID-19. We sent notices out directly to businesses with known email addresses, to city clerks and other regional contacts to share with their contacts, and shared in our newsletter, on Facebook, and on our website to let as many people as possible know about how FORWARD can help them. We also hired a consultant to be on-call to answer phone calls and emails from business owners needing assistance with FORWARD, with specific grant programs, or with understanding where to start. These efforts to help businesses in our region have kept us busy all summer and are winding down now with many CARES Act programs fully subscribed, but some funding programs, like the \$50 million in CARES Act fisheries assistance, have yet to open, so we expect our one-on-one assistance to businesses to stretch through fall and possibly winter.

PARTNERSHIPS

ARDORs/Economic Development Organizations

SWAMC staff has developed a much stronger relationship with the other ARDORs and statewide economic development organizations through regular participation in videoconferences hosted by DCCED (weekly ARDOR call) and Nolan Klouda of UAA Center for Economic Development (biweekly economic developers call). These regular calls have proven to be immensely valuable to learn from others doing similar work, share successes and challenges, give and receive feedback, and better understand initiatives in other parts of the state and the individuals behind them. The DCCED calls are being held for the ARDORs who received state CARES funding to help businesses access COVID-19 relief funds, and the economic developers call has been held since early April in response to the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic. There has been discussion in that call about solidifying the economic developers' group into a more permanent designation to last beyond the current crisis and that process is moving forward in recent weeks with surveys to identify what role the group should play, content and frequency of meetings, and a name for the group.

Alaska Congressional Delegation

SWAMC hosted a teleconference with Senator Dan Sullivan on August 27 to provide an opportunity for leaders in the southwest Alaska region to address the Senator directly with their challenges, concerns, and questions. We had solid participation from Kodiak, Naknek, Aleknagik, Dillingham, and the Aleutians East Borough and it was a great discussion. We discussed fisheries assistance, Pebble Mine, COVID-19 responses both state- and nationwide and marine/air transportation challenges in the region. It is a hallmark of the State of Alaska that we are often given the opportunity to talk directly with our federal delegation and have a personal connection with them.

Marquardt has had several conversations with Rep. Edgmon and Rep. Stutes regarding the AMHS and COVID-19 recovery and they continue to stay engaged with local government leaders as we make our way into fall.